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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001782

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, A/S KANSTEINER AND PDAS SNYDER; AF/S FOR
DELISI AND RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FRAZER
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2008

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [Z1](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF STATE NKOMO ON INTERPARTY TALKS: HASTE
MAKES WASTE

REF: A) HARARE 1711 B) PRETORIA 4820

Classified By: DCM REWHITEHEAD DUE TO 1.5 (B) AND (D).

11. (c) Summary. The Ambassador met with Minister of State for Special Affairs John Nkomo on September 10 as a follow up to last month's meeting (ref a). The talks centered on HIV/AIDS programs, the role of NGOs in distributing humanitarian food assistance, the status of interparty dialogue, and a snippet on ZANU-PF internal mechanisms. Nkomo was long on bonhomie but short on substance. His take on interparty dialogue -- there is no hurry here -- was not reassuring. We should consider how we can best use the South Africans to prod the GOZ to speed up its go-slow approach to political reconciliation. End summary.

Mopane Junction

12. (sbu) Nkomo kicked off the meeting by expressing GOZ appreciation for the USG's "mildly positive" statement on the recent mayoral and urban council elections. The Ambassador responded that our goal for any statement is objectivity. He turned the conversation to Mopane Junction, a popular USAID-funded radio serial dealing with HIV/AIDS issues that was peremptorily taken off the air by the Ministry of Information (MOI) two months ago. The Ambassador reported that there were positive indications that the MOI would relent and resume Mopane Junction broadcasts in October. Nkomo said that strong support from the Minister of Health had turned the tide and commented that "the troubled waters" had complicated this issue, referring to an embassy press release critical of the MOI decision. The Ambassador replied that we had taken a patient approach to the MOI decision and had gone public only as a last resort. The important thing was that the program would be back on the air. Nkomo assented.

Humanitarian Food Aid

13. (sbu) The Ambassador recounted the meeting (ref a) in which Minister of Labor and Social Welfare July Moyo had assured House staffer Malik Chaka that there would be no changes in food distribution procedures this year. Moyo had passed similar assurances to WFP/UNDP in separate meetings. It was a fact, however, that the written policy from his ministry did not say this. We had also received reports of NGOs being "strongly warned" about their field activities. WFP was presently negotiating an MOU with the ministry, and we hoped that it would reflect a continued central role for NGOs that respected the need for distributing food on an impartial basis.

14. (sbu) Nkomo replied that President Mugabe had repeatedly assured WFP Director James Morris that food distribution would be impartial. He added the caveat that some NGOs had in the past not respected "understandings" with the government. They hired representatives with their own agendas who were not always properly behaved. The Ambassador said that in practice food distribution on the ground so far looked like last year's. We hoped that it would remain so. Nkomo asked that the donors report when and where problems crop up -- the GOZ could be of help. The Ambassador agreed that we should work together to assure that no local government official or individual NGO employee deviates from the criteria of providing food to those who most need it.

Interparty Dialogue

15. (c) The Ambassador recalled reassuring statements Nkomo had made (ref a) on the dialogue, a comment that sent Nkomo into a convoluted circumlocution, the bottom line being that "fast-tracking can be hazardous." The Ambassador observed

that this could well be said of the land redistribution exercise. Nkomo pressed on that he had explained to the Ambassador that there was not yet in place any formalized structures. There were teams on both sides seeking to define structures that would eventually permit issues to be collated. He stressed that this should be the central focus of the dialogue; an MDC/ZANU-PF merger should not be the focus.

16. (c) Nkomo continued that it would be necessary to address root causes and not dwell on the symptoms, as in the past. Pre-eminent issues should be brought to the forefront. He noted that the constitution was under debate by both sides and stated that this was a proper starting point. The Ambassador asked if the mechanism for transition to a government operating under a new constitution would be one constitutional issue under examination. Nkomo dithered, noting that general elections were only a year away, obviating the need to focus on transition arrangements. The Ambassador replied that the elections were in fact scheduled for 2005. Nkomo said that in addition to discussing the constitution, the dialogue would ideally result in identifying and correcting past abuses. He was encouraged by new laws that explicitly recognized the existence of the opposition. The atmosphere was much improved. In fact, he expansively noted, when the environment came right, he suspected that neither side would find that there was much to talk about. The Ambassador asked Nkomo what the timing for all this might be. Nkomo dithered further and concluded that the constitution was a good starting point.

Developments in ZANU-PF

17. (sbu) The Ambassador queried Nkomo on the significance of announced internal ZANU-PF elections in advance of the December party congress: party districts in September, district coordinating committees in October, and provincial level elections in November. (Note. One independent newspaper optimistically attempted to portray these as a prelude to Mugabe's retirement in the near future. End note.) Nkomo explained these as an upward cascade that would eventually lead to the election of the most senior officials, including the party presidency. Nkomo noted that major migrations within Zimbabwe have wreaked havoc with local party structures. The upcoming elections would rectify this. Presidential Secretary Willard Chiwewe and an MFA official backstopped Nkomo; the DCM accompanied the Ambassador.

Comment

18. (c) We score Nkomo 9.8 on form and 2 on substance. His comments, unfocused as they were, seemed to confirm MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai's concerns, reported septel, that ZANU-PF is in no hurry to press ahead with the interparty dialogue. We are getting hints from numerous ZANU-PF sources that 2005 is the soonest that any significant change might take place. This is obviously not acceptable from either an economic or a social point of view. We believe that it would be worthwhile to suggest to the South Africans in our pre-UNGA consultations (ref b) the need for them to prod the GOZ to move much more expeditiously toward meaningful dialogue with MDC as the best way to break the political impasse.
SULLIVAN